

The Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

Civilianization of Traditional Law Enforcement Roles

**An Administrative Research Paper
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ABSTRACT

Police agencies across Texas are continually faced with a shrinking budget and, at the same time, a demand to provide more services to the community. This research is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it offers a solution to the problem of shrinking budgets and requests more service for the community. Until law enforcement and city administrators consider alternative measures to better serve the community and save scarce funds, they will be faced with adverse effects. All city and law enforcement administrators, as well as the taxpayers, stand to benefit from the results of this research because everyone is looking to gain more productivity and cost savings without having to exhaust the few resources departments have.

The purpose of this research is to show how civilians can perform many time-consuming duties that officers are performing. These civilians could answer low priority calls for service, such as lost or recovered property. They could deliver or pick up warrants from the Municipal and Justice of the Peace offices. They can take reports over the phone or in the front lobby of the police department. These civilians could assist at crime scenes or assist in other duties as needed. All these duties could be performed while allowing officers to stay on the streets.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: a review of previous research on this topic, such as other research papers, written articles, Internet sites, and abstracts from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service. The researcher discovered that police departments across the state of Texas using civilian report writers are saving their departments money while keeping officers on the streets and increasing officer productivity.

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INTRODUCTION

Many police departments in the state of Texas are looking for methods to provide better service to the community while facing shrinking budgets. The issue to be examined is if the civilianization of traditional law enforcement roles can increase productivity and cost and still provide the types of services citizens demand but with fewer resources. The relevance of the civilianization of the traditional law enforcement role to law enforcement is that civilians can take some of the duties that a sworn officer must complete, thereby allowing the officer more time on the street where they may be needed.

The purpose of this research will demonstrate how civilians performing time consuming duties can keep patrolling officers out on the street. Civilians could answer low priority calls for service. They could be used to deliver to and from the Municipal and Justice of the Peace office. These civilians could handle the lobby area and the phoned in reports at the police department. They can also assist detectives at crimes scenes and any other non-priority duties needed. While these duties are being performed by civilians, officers can remain on the street. The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not hiring civilians to perform low-priority duties can save the police departments money while keeping officers out on patrol to better serve the community.

The intended method of inquiry includes a review of articles, Internet sites, previous papers written on this topic, and a survey distributed to 50 law enforcement agencies across the state of Texas. Follow-up questions were asked, over the phone, to the departments that responded they did not have civilian report takers. For the purpose

of obtaining information, survey questions were asked and the responses were recorded.

The intended outcome of the research will examine whether or not the use of civilians in traditional law enforcement roles can benefit both the police departments and the communities it serves. In allowing civilians to answer the low priority calls and allowing them to take lobby and phone reports saves department's manpower and money. By using civilian report takers, a police department can offer the types of service the community wants and still operate within budget constraints.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research because shrinking police departments budgets and the need for more officers on the streets will always spark discussion and debate amongst city leaders, department administrations, and citizens. With more officers patrolling city streets, investigating violent crimes and incarcerating criminals is a benefit everyone can live with. Civilians can never take the place of a sworn officer on the street, but they can help cut the department's cost by taking the officers place at the office.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the literature review, it was determined that the issue of civilians in law enforcement roles has been dealt with since the 1960s. The late 1970s and early 1980s was the first time civilians were used in law enforcement. Before this time, sworn police officers performed these duties, including dispatching. In 1967, the Presidents Crime Commission made recommendations, like the use of civilians, while attempting to resolve the urban police crisis (Pannell, 1995).

Hennessy (1976) surveyed 16 police departments. He showed that all 16 departments were using civilians, mostly in the areas of administration, crime scene technicians, traffic investigations, and crime analysis. Hennessy (1976) also stated that personnel costs accounted for 90% of these departments' budgets. Four benefits that Hennessy mentioned were dollar savings, greater availability of sworn personnel for law enforcement work, increased specialization applied to particular tasks, and increased productivity.

Snow (1989) mentioned several benefits in support of civilianization. Cost savings was the first. The fact that civilians are paid less and had fewer benefits cut the police departments' personnel costs. Another benefit was that sworn officers could be more active in pursuing in-progress and violent calls for service. By giving civilians the responsibility to handle the low priority calls, Snow (1989) listed productivity as a benefit. If a civilian hired has specific training in one area, he or she does a better job. Another benefit listed was that civilians were not promoted out of their jobs. When a street officer is promoted to the rank of detective and moved to another division, then he or she must be trained for a new assignment. Civilians hired for a specific job stay in that field. The last benefit listed by Snow (1989) was that the civilian positions could serve as an intern program. This means civilians could work with the police officers to see if they are really interested in working in law enforcement as a career.

In 2001, Ashe wrote that, in the 1980s, three police departments began experimenting with what was called Differential Police Responses or DPR. These departments used mail-in reports, telephone reports, and civilian call takers. In Garden Grove Police Department, the report showed they had an increase of 40% in the

number of reports taken by the DPR compared to officer initiated reports.(Ashe, 2001)

Schander (2003) wrote that the numbers of civilian employees who work for police departments across the county were growing in record numbers. Gomez (2008) stated that the idea of using civilians has been around since the late 1980s. He claimed that civilians required less training and were less expensive than sworn officers and could respond to minor police calls. Gomez (2008) quoted Richard Brady, the president of the Palo Alto, California based Matrix Consulting Group as saying, "It hasn't been universally adopted throughout the Country. But most areas have at least thought about the alternative and are more open to it now because of the economy" (p. 3). Captain William Gitmed (2007), of the San Francisco Police Department, discussed a new tool for reporting: online reporting. Gitmed (2007) referred to individuals incorporating internet usage in almost every aspect of their lives. From shopping to banking, these citizens could see using this resource as a way of communicating with law enforcement. Citizens that used the service were pleased and sent e-mail messages commending the police department for the online service. Benefits of online reporting can be seen by both the law enforcement agency and the citizens that use it. Agencies have the ability to serve the community while keeping officers on the streets (Gitmed, 2007).

In April 2008, Melissa Duran, a Las Vegas Channel 8 Eyewitness News reporter, interviewed Metro Lieutenant Charles Hank (Duran, 2008). The interview was in reference to the agency using Patrol Service Representatives. Lieutenant Hank stated that the Las Vegas Metro Police Department uses its civilians to cut cost and to keep officers on the streets. Metro currently employs 13 Patrol Services Representatives (PSR's). These PSR's undergo a three-month training course, which is not as intensive

as the courses for becoming a sworn officer. These PSR's do not deal directly with suspects. They do not have the same powers as a police officer. They save the department on training costs and still provide a quality service (Duran, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not the hiring of civilians can benefit a police department. There are two benefits that can be identified. First, hiring civilians to take reports would free up sworn police officers to handle more in-progress and violent calls for service. With more officers on the streets, they can be more responsive to the needs of the community they serve. The second benefit would be to identify the cost savings for the department by utilizing civilians, while, at the same time, providing a valuable service to the community.

The researcher hypothesizes that there are many law enforcement agencies in the state of Texas looking for methods to provide a better service to the community while facing shrinking budgets. The researcher further hypothesizes that by using civilians in traditional law enforcement roles, department administrators will see cost-savings when employing these valuable assets.

The method of inquiry will include a review of previous research on this topic, such as other Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT) research papers, written articles, Internet sites, and abstracts from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of the civilianization of traditional law enforcement roles will include a survey questionnaire, which is listed as Appendix 1. The survey will consist of five questions with two follow-up questions. The researcher will contact 50

law enforcement agencies via the telephone, and their responses will be recorded on a blank copy of the survey. The percentage ratings recorded will be only approximations. The information surveyed will also be categorized to illustrate the number of reports the civilian report takers complete in one year, the salaries of both sworn officers and the civilian report takers, and the amount of time saved by having a civilian take the reports.

The researcher's original hypothesis will determine if there is a cost-savings benefit of training part-time jailers to take walk-in or over the phone reports. The survey instrument will identify the number of departments using jailers in the report taking process. From the review of literature, three police departments will be identified in using civilian report takers. The researcher located a complete list of law enforcement agencies in Texas from a website on the Internet. Three police departments were identified in a 2001 LEMIT research paper, and these departments were contacted by phone to conduct the survey. From these departments, the researcher was referred to other law enforcement agencies using this program. It was learned, after contacting the first three police departments, that no one used jailers to take reports but, instead, used full time civilian report takers.

It was at this time that the researcher realized the hypothesis needed to be modified from jailer report takers to civilian report takers. The researcher modified the survey instrument to reflect a civilian report taker program. From the list of law enforcement agencies, 50 police departments were randomly selected. The researcher will make phone contact with each of these departments and speak with a representative from each department. Each representative will answer the survey questions, and these answers will be recorded by the researcher.

The first question will ask if the agency employs civilian report takers. Another question will deal with the number of reports taken over the phone and how many reports are taken in the front office. The third and fourth questions will be in reference to pay salaries for a sworn officer and a civilian report taker. If the respondent advises that they do not have civilian report takers, two follow-up questions will be asked. First, they will be asked why the department does not have civilian report takers. The respondents will be given a choice of four possible responses: the civilian is not properly trained for report writing, the daily duty of the civilian employee does not allow time for report writing, the agency's philosophy is that an officer should meet with the citizen, or the department has a different reason for not having civilian report takers. A second follow-up question will ask whether the department could benefit from a trained civilian to taking reports if the department decided to have trained civilians report takers.

The response rate of the survey instrument resulted in a 100% return rate. Twenty-four of the surveyed departments had civilian report takers. These departments employed 100 or less officers. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by law enforcement administrators and city leaders to hopefully assist them in adopting the program. By hiring civilians as report takers, they can provide a method for dealing with the crisis of shrinking budgets and provide better services to their communities.

FINDINGS

In Figure 1, of the 50 law enforcement agencies contacted, the 16 departments using civilian report takers were categorized into three groups depending on the number of sworn officers each department employed. Eighteen percent of the departments

surveyed were large sized departments and employed more than 201 sworn officers.

Fifty-four percent of these departments were medium sized departments and employed between 100 and 200 sworn officers. Finally, 24% of the surveyed departments were small sized departments and only employed from 1 to 99 officers.

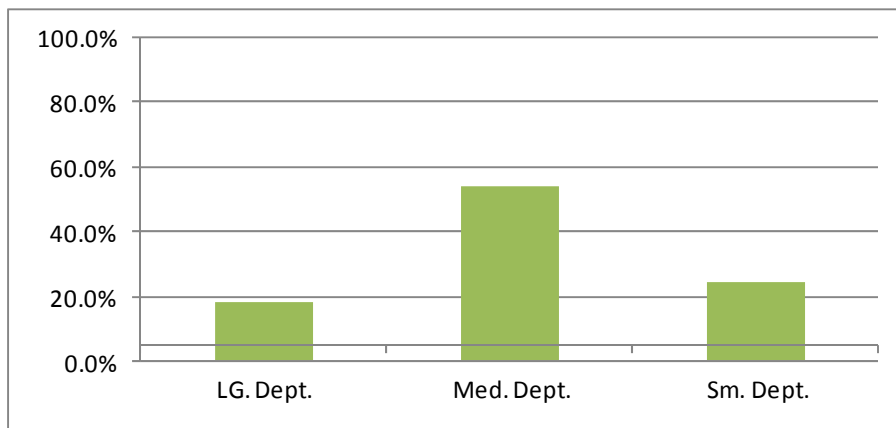


Figure 1. Percentages of different sized agencies that have report takers

Table I shows the data from the survey poll by listing the first three agencies as large departments, the next nine departments as medium, and the last four as small departments. The chart is broken down to list the average number of reports each report taker took in one year, the average rate of pay for a sworn officer, the average rate of pay for a civilian report taker, the average savings per department, and the number of hours officers were able to stay on the street to answer calls.

Table I. Breakdown of departments' yearly reports, rate of pay, yearly savings and yearly extra patrolling hours

	Name of Police Dept.		Average number of reports taken a year	Average rate of pay for officers	Average rate of pay for civilian report takers	Average savings rate of officers compared to civilians	Number of hours officers allowed extra for patrolling
1	Killeen P.D.		4,320	\$21.00	\$12.50	\$12,247	2160
2	Austin P.D.		5,000	\$26.00	\$16.00	\$25,000	2,500
3	Plano P.D.		5,000	\$26.00	\$13.00	\$32,500	2,500
1	Victoria P.D.		1,300	\$19.00	\$13.00	\$3,900	650
2	Lewis ville P.D.		4,320	\$31.00	\$20.00	\$23,760	2,160
3	Allen P.D.		3,300	\$23.00	\$16.00	\$11,550	1,650
4	Round Rock P.D.		1,080	\$23.00	\$17.00	\$3,240	540
5	McKinney P.D.		1,080	\$30.00	\$15.50	\$7,830	540
6	Richardson P.D.		1,020	\$23.00	\$17.00	\$3,060	510
7	Longview P.D.		2,036	\$20.00	\$12.50	\$7,635	1,018
8	N. Richland Hills P.D.		1,800	\$25.00	\$12.00	\$11,700	900
9	Bryan P.D.		290	\$30.00	\$12.00	\$3,900	145
1	Harker Hieghts P.D.		3,960	\$17.00	\$11.00	\$11,880	1980
2	Sherman P.D.		1,800	\$20.00	\$12.00	\$7,200	900
3	Hurst P.D.		240	\$30.00	\$15.00	\$1,800	120
4	Halton City P.D.		240	\$24.00	\$13.00	\$13,200	120

After reviewing the surveys, 34 of the 50 departments surveyed did not use civilian report takers. Of these 34 departments, the follow-up questions were asked. The first question asked why the department did not utilize civilian report takers. The survey listed 4 answers identified by the letters A, B, C, and D. Approximately 15% answered (A) that they were not properly trained to take reports. Six percent answered (B) that jailer's daily duties did not allow them time to take reports. Seventy-two percent answered (C) that the department's philosophy is that officers should meet the public. The remaining 9% answered "other," (D) and they were asked to give the reason why jailers did not take reports.

The surveyed departments responded to a second follow-up question. They were asked if their department could benefit from using civilian report takers. Of the 34 departments that did not utilize civilian report takers, 92% responded it would be a benefit to the department. Only 8% said it would not be a benefit to the department.

The researcher determined that a small sized department, on average, took approximately 700 reports per year. A medium sized department took approximately 4,500 reports per year, and a large sized department took approximately 7,000 reports per year. Interestingly, the response was that the same numbers of reports, on average, were taken over the phone as were taken in the front lobby.

Salaries were the next item surveyed. The respondents were asked to give an approximate dollar value paid to a beginning sworn officer and the salary for a paid civilian report taker. The amounts varied from agency to agency; all amounts were recorded on the survey sheet for each agency, and the salaries were averaged. The small sized department paid their officer an average of \$23.00 per hour. The medium sized department paid an officer an average of \$25.00 an hour. Finally, the large sized department paid an officer an average of \$24.00 an hour.

Salaries for a civilian report taker also varied from agency to agency. The small departments paid an average of \$13.00 an hour. The medium departments paid an average of \$15.00 an hour, and the large departments paid an average of \$24.00 an hour. Figure 2, shows the different rates of pay for sworn officers and a civilian report takers.

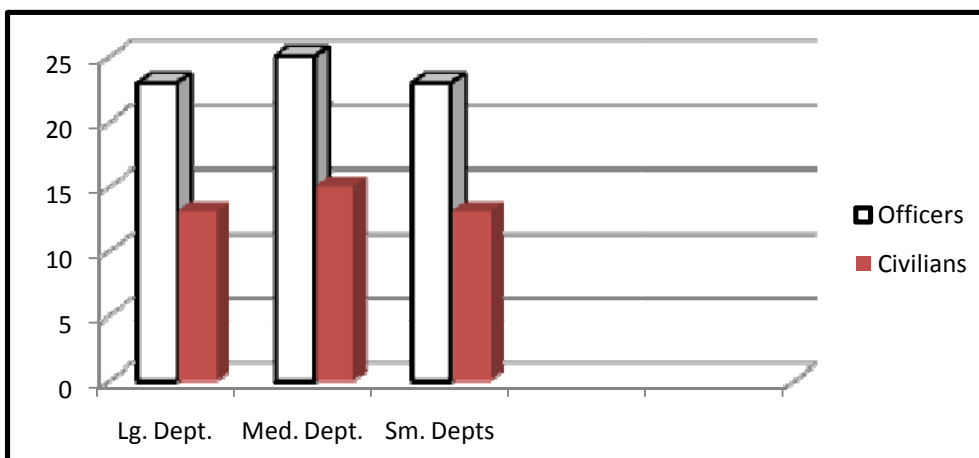


Figure 2. Compares the difference in rate of pay between an officer and a civilian report taker for different sized agencies.

Once the number of reports and the paid dollar amounts were recorded, it was also found that time savings was a benefit. When a call is dispatched to an officer working at the police department, his total response time is approximately 30 minutes. This includes the response time to the location, the gathering of information, and completing a typed report. The research showed that, on average, a small sized department saved approximately \$8,500.00 a year. The medium sized department saved approximately \$8,500.00 a year, and a large sized department saved approximately \$23,500.00 a year.

Finally, the survey data showed how departments were able to leave an officer on the street longer by using civilian report takers. On average, a small-sized department kept officers on the streets 753 hours more than if they were in the office taking reports. A medium-sized department kept officers on the street an additional 900 hours. A large-sized department kept officers on the street an additional 2,400 hours.

DISCUSSIONS/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not the civilianization of the modern law enforcement role can provide a benefit in dealing with shrinking budgets while keeping officers out on the streets to better service the community. The purpose of this research was to provide a helpful understanding for law enforcement administrators and city officials that civilian report takers can play a vital role in saving scarce resources. The research questions focused on examining two benefits. First, the research showed that civilian report takers are beneficial to police agencies by reducing the cost of officers taking reports in the station. Second, a law enforcement agency is better able to serve the community by increasing the number of hours officers are able to patrol the community.

The researcher hypothesized that there are many law enforcement agencies in the state of Texas that are looking for methods to provide a better service to the community while facing shrinking budgets. The researcher further hypothesized that using civilians in some traditional law enforcement roles will cause department administrations to adopt measures to employ these valuable assets.

The researcher concluded from the findings that valued and scarce resources are being saved by those law enforcement agencies across the state of Texas that utilizes the civilian report taker program. They are also providing better service for their communities by keeping officers on the streets to handle the in-progress and violent crimes being committed.

The findings of the research did support the hypotheses. All of the departments that participated in this research project reported a cost benefit to their departments as

well as an increase in patrol time by their officers. These law enforcement agencies are providing a better service to their communities; they are also saving money while keeping officers on the street longer.

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because the traditional belief among law enforcement agencies and the citizens is that an officer should be present to meet the complainants. The study of civilianizing the modern law enforcement role is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because until the city and law enforcement administrators consider alternative measures for better servicing the community and saving scarce funds, they will be faced with adverse effects. All city and law enforcement administrators, as well as taxpayers, stand to benefit from the results of this research because everyone is looking for ways to improve productivity and produce cost savings without having to exhaust the few resources departments have.

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APPENDIX

Name of Agency: _____

Contact Person: _____

Civilian Report Taker Survey

1. Does your Agency employ Civilian Report Takers? YES NO
 2. Approximately how many reports are taken? _____ Phone _____ F.O. _____
 3. Average Salary for Police Officer?
 4. Average Salary for Civilian Report Taker?
-

If, your department, does not employ civilian report takers? Why Not?

- A. Not properly trained for report writing
- B. Daily duties do not allow time for report taking
- C. Agency's philosophy is that an officer should meet with citizens
- D. Other (explain)

If the department employed a civilian report taker, to take a report over the phone or in the Front Office, do you think this would benefit the department? YES NO